

Despite tight security, Harry Potter book leaked on Internet

By David Mehegan, Globe Staff | July 17, 2007

Despite intense international security, the entire text of “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows” has been leaked on the Internet, four days before its official release at 12:01 a.m. Saturday.

Photographs of what appears to be every page of the 784-page book were posted Tuesday on several file-sharing sites and then posted openly as photos on Internet pages. In the photos, the book is held open on a carpet with one hand. Some of the text is blurry, but most of it — including the ending and the fate of the main character — is clearly legible.

Tuesday’s events underscore the intense anticipation that has been building toward the seventh and final novel in J.K. Rowling’s huge-selling series about the boy from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Fans have been speculating for years about how it will all end: Does Harry live or die?

Lawyers for Scholastic, the series’ US publisher, have subpoenaed a file-sharing site called Gaiaonline.com, asking for the name of the person who had posted the text on that site, and Gaia had turned over the name and removed the photos, according to Bloomberg News. But the photos remained available last night on several other sites.

“We knew as we got closer to the publication date, more and more people would go to greater lengths” to compromise the secrecy of the novel, said Lisa Holton, Scholastic’s president of trade publishing and book fairs. She downplayed the revelations, saying there are several versions of a leaked text circulating on the Web, and that they contradict one another. “Most of the websites that these have appeared on, we have asked them to take them down, and a majority have been cooperative.”

The identity of the leaker, and how he or she obtained a copy of the book, wasn’t known, but other people appear to be taking things a step further. A posting on one file-sharing site yesterday seemed to be recruiting volunteers to type the words from the photographs into text documents, in order to make them more legible.

“I have spent the better part of 3 hours now making the pages readable and separating them into chapters,” the post reads. “I’m looking for people who are willing to type up pages.” The post included an e-mail address. The Globe sent an inquiry to it, and a person named Kyle Giovanni replied: “I didn’t leak it, I’m just a fan who is taking some pretty illegible picture files and making them into legible word files.”

Other fans were chagrined at the news of the leaks.

“That’s totally obnoxious,” said Barbara McMahon of Wellesley, who plans to take her three children to a Potter party Friday night. “Why would someone want to ruin it for everyone else? Now, it’s going to be all over everything, and it will be hard to avoid knowing what happens. It’s just unbelievable.” McMahon says she will avoid newspapers, radio, and TV until she has finished reading the book. “I just don’t want to know what happens until the last page.”

Some booksellers were downright angry. “That is so cruel and mean. It’s despicable,” said Jane Dawson, co-owner of Porter Square Books in Cambridge. “I think they should arrest the person and put a gag on him. I don’t want to know — no one wants to know. I feel as though a balloon has been deflated.”

With a first printing of 12 million in the United States alone, the security surrounding “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows” may be unprecedented. To receive their copies of the book, booksellers had to agree to stringent rules, under threat of legal action if they violated them. They must keep the books in a secure area until 12:01 a.m. Saturday, and cannot allow members of the media to enter the area or know its location. They cannot reveal when or whether the books have arrived. The rules even forbid booksellers to talk about “any and all Harry Potter books” to the media without written permission from Scholastic.

It’s the same in England. Trucks were being watched by satellite tracking technology, according to the Sunday Telegraph newspaper, while pallets carrying loads of cartons of books were being fitted with alarms.

Nevertheless, some production details have leaked out. Publishers Weekly reported online this week that R.R. Donnelley, a large book printer, was producing the book at one of its plants, in Crawfordsville, Ind., and that workers there were subject to lunchbox searches, could not bring cellphones to work, and could be penalized if caught reading on the job. The books were being shipped out yesterday from distributors by UPS.

Some booksellers said they don’t believe most young readers will allow the plot spoilers to get to them, if they can avoid it.

Carol Chittenden, owner of Eight Cousins, a children’s bookstore in Falmouth, said she was confident that most young fans will avoid the revelations.

“It’s like opening your Christmas packages beforehand,” she said. “Why would you do that? Why not prolong your anticipation as long as possible? One jerk is not going to spoil the party.”

Bella English of the Globe staff contributed to this report. David Mehegan can be reached at mehegan@globe.com

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